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Letter dated 24 March 2015 from the Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the Permanent Mission of Luxembourg to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council

I have the honour to transmit to you a letter dated 24 March 2015 from the Special Representative of the National Coalition of Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces (see annex).

I should be grateful if you would have the present letter and its annex circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Olivier **Maes**
Chargé d'affaires a.i.

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Annex to the letter dated 24 March 2015 from the Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the Permanent Mission of Luxembourg to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council

[Original: English]

On behalf of the people of Syria and the National Coalition of Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces, it is my grave responsibility to draw to your attention the deteriorating humanitarian situation in Syria and the ongoing abuses perpetrated by Syrian regime forces and extremist terrorist groups, in direct violation of Security Council resolutions 2118 (2013), 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014) and 2209 (2015). The systematic perpetration of atrocities against Syrian civilians cannot be allowed to continue with impunity. Decisive action, including the imposition of a no-fly zone, must be undertaken by Security Council members to relieve the suffering of Syrian civilians and deter future atrocities.

March marked yet another deadly month for the Syrian people. As outlined in the enclosure, by 24 March 1,288 Syrians had been killed, 1,045 of them civilians. Of those civilians, 265 were killed as a result of aerial assaults conducted by Syrian regime air forces. Less than two weeks after the Security Council adopted resolution 2209 (2015), Syrian regime forces also deployed chemical weapons to injure, kill and terrorize civilians. On 16 March, six civilians — three of them children — were killed when Syrian regime helicopters dropped chlorine gas, a chemical agent, on the Syrian village of Sarmin, in Idlib governorate.

In March, Assad continued to use aerial attacks to besiege opposition-held areas and starve civilians into submission. According to the United Nations, at present 212,000 Syrians are living under siege, 185,000 of whom are besieged by Syrian armed forces and their affiliated militias. We believe these figures to be gross underestimations. According to the Syrian American Medical Society, a total of 640,200 people reside in besieged areas, the vast majority of whom are trapped by Syrian regime forces.

Life for Syrians in besieged areas is horrific. Syrians trapped behind regime lines suffer from chronic malnutrition, starvation, dehydration, communicable diseases and chronic conditions that, when left untreated, can become deadly. They are systematically denied essential items like food, water, medicine, electricity and fuel, as a result of which many are forced to forage for tree leaves and wild plants in urban areas. Because Syrian regime forces target medical workers and deny the passage of medical relief items, medical professionals and urgently needed medicine are often absent. The few medical professionals who remain in besieged areas report having to reuse blood bags, while a lack of electricity makes the safe storage of blood plasma impossible and a lack of anaesthetics means surgeries are often performed without them.

The war crimes and crimes against humanity perpetrated by Syrian regime forces are conducted as part of a State policy that has resulted in the deaths of over 220,000 Syrians, the forcible displacement of 11.5 million people and the rise of violent extremist groups, like ISIL, that torture, rape and terrorize with impunity. Regime policy also violates international humanitarian and international human rights law, including the fourth Geneva Convention, to which Syria is a party, as well as Security Council resolutions 2118 (2013), 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014) and 2209 (2015). These resolutions can and must be enforced.

Comprehensive action undertaken by the Security Council can immediately relieve the suffering of Syrians, prevent future atrocities and lay the basis for a political transition to peace and democracy. To do so, members of the Council must act without delay to:

- **Enforce Security Council resolutions 2118 (2013) and 2209 (2015) and authorize a no-fly zone over parts of Syria.** Aerial bombardment remains the Syrian regime's primary weapon of choice, allowing Assad's air forces to strike civilians indiscriminately and with impunity. A no-fly zone would put an immediate halt to such suffering, reducing the rate at which people are dying by as much as 30 per cent. It would create the conditions needed to establish a safe zone throughout parts of Syria and enable Syria's displaced people to begin the process of return. A no-fly zone is not a panacea. But, if successful, it would provide a way to begin to get a grip on the situation on the ground and create the conditions needed for responsible governance and the return of basic services. The Security Council has repeatedly pledged to employ Chapter VII measures in instances of non-compliance with resolution 2118 (2013); it is vital that it take such action now.

- **Refer the situation in Syria to the International Criminal Court.** The Syrian regime and extremist terrorist groups have committed war crimes and crimes against humanity. The victims of those crimes deserve justice. A referral to the Court would not only put an end to impunity, it would deter further atrocities by establishing clear consequences for deadly actions and a vehicle for accountability.

- **Enforce the mandate in Security Council resolutions 2165 (2014) and 2191 (2014).** Despite the adoption of Security Council resolutions 2191 (2014) and 2165 (2014), 640,200 Syrians remain trapped in besieged areas and millions more remain trapped behind conflict lines. Members of the Council should demand the full implementation of Council resolutions 2191 (2014), 2165 (2014) and 2139 (2014) and call on United Nations agencies to scale up their assistance across Syria's border with Turkey and Jordan.

- **Increase humanitarian commitments to the Syrian people.** On 31 March, the Third International Pledging Conference for Syria will take place in Kuwait City. We ask that members of the Security Council increase their commitments at this year's pledging conference to ensure that the United Nations meets its goal of raising $8.4 billion to help the people of Syria. Doing so will help save lives.

By employing the comprehensive action proposed above, the Security Council can begin to end the slaughter in large parts of Syria and lay the foundation needed for a political solution to the crisis. The Syrian National Coalition continues to believe that a political solution is the only way to create a lasting peace in Syria. But before such a solution can be reached, we must employ all measures possible to stop the violence and stem the death toll. With every day we wait, more Syrians will suffer and more civilians will die. Through your actions and moral courage, the

members of the Security Council can stop the suffering in Syria today. On behalf of my people, I appeal to you to do so.

(*Signed*) Najib **Ghadbian**
Special Representative
to the United Nations
National Coalition of Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces

Enclosure

Syrian regime non-compliance with Security Council resolution 2139 (2014)

Paragraph 3. All parties immediately cease attacks against civilians and the indiscriminate employment of weapons in populated areas

- During the reporting period, Syrian regime forces continued to deliberately target camps, residential communities and crowded markets with explosive barrel bombs, ground-to-ground missiles and other weapons of widespread destruction.
- The total number of Syrians killed by Syrian regime forces in February 2015 was 1,251, according to the Syrian Human Rights Network. This included 123 women and 139 children. During the first three weeks of March, an additional 1,288 people were killed by Syrian regime forces.
- Regime massacres occurred in the following locations: Rif Dimashq, where 18 persons were killed; Aleppo, where 6 persons were killed; Idlib, where 4 persons were killed; Dara'a, where 3 persons were killed; Deir ez-Zor, where 3 persons were killed; Damascus, where 1 person was killed; Latakia, where 1 person was killed; and Hasake, where 1 person was killed.
- Barrel bombs continued to hit the city of Aleppo. In February, 116 barrel bombs were dropped on Aleppo, of which four were loaded with gases (chemical weapons).
- Regime forces launched 242 rockets from warplanes, two attacks with cluster bombs and 23 surface-to-surface missiles, which caused the deaths of 99 people, including 19 women and 23 children.
- Regime forces continued their policy of torture in prisons. In February, the Syrian Network for Human Rights documented the killing of 74 people under torture in regime prisons.
- The Syrian Network for Human Rights documented 12 massacres in the besieged area of Eastern Ghouta in February. A total of 181 people were killed, of whom 34 were children and 32 were women. Details of the massacres are set out below:
  - On 2 February 2015, warplanes bombed the city of Douma, Rif Dimashq, killing 10 people, including 2 women.
  - On 4 February 2015, warplanes bombed Douma, killing seven people, including four children.
  - On 5 February 2015, warplanes bombed the town of Ain Tarma, Rif Dimashq, killing nine people, including one child and one woman.
  - On 5 February 2015, warplanes bombed the city of Arbin, Rif Dimashq, killing seven people, including two children and two women.
  - On 5 February 2015, Syrian warplanes bombed Kafr Batna's produce market, killing 39 people, including 6 children and 4 women.

- On 5 February 2015, warplanes bombed Douma, killing 30 people, including 3 children and 10 women.
- On 6 February 2015, regime forces bombed Douma with about 40 missiles from rocket launchers, killing 13 people, including 4 children and 2 women.
- On 8 February 2015, regime forces bombed Douma with rockets, killing eight people, including four children and one woman.
- On 9 February 2015, the Syrian regime forces bombed Douma, killing 37 people, including 5 children and 4 women.
- On 21 February 2015, the Syrian regime forces bombed Douma, killing seven people, including two children and four women.
- On 22 February 2015, Syrian warplanes bombed Douma, killing six people, including one child and one woman.
- On 27 February 2015, Syrian warplanes bombed the city of Marj al-Sultan, Rif Dimashq, killing eight people, including two children and one woman.

– On the evening of 16 March, chemical weapons equipped with chlorine gas were deployed in the village of Sarmeen, killing a family of six (the mother and father of three children, and a grandmother).

– The Syrian Human Rights Network has documented the use of chemical toxic gases (most notably, poisonous chlorine gas) as weapons of war by the Syrian regime a total of 78 times since the adoption of Security Council resolution 2118 (2013), including six cases after the adoption of Council resolution 2209 (2015), in 32 Syrian areas, which caused the death of 59 people, including 11 children and 6 women, and injuries to about 1,370 people.

Paragraphs 8 and 10. All parties must immediately cease attacks against medical facilities and other civilian objects, as well as against medical personnel, and prioritize, to the fullest possible, medical attention for those in need.

– The Syrian regime continued its deliberate targeting of health centres. In March, four attacks by the Syrian regime on health centres were documented:

- An attack on a field hospital in Kafr Zita, Rif Hama, on 6 March 2015. The hospital was directly hit with barrel bombs from helicopters.
- A targeted attack on the Central Laboratory in Eastern Ghouta, Rif Dimashq, on 18 March 2015. Regime shelling injured staff and destroyed equipment.
- A targeted attack on Ehssan hospital in the town of Saraqib, Idlib, with a missile warhead from a warplane on 18 March 2015. The bombing caused considerable damage to the building and the destruction of medical equipment and ambulances.
- A targeted attack on the field hospital of Maraba, Dara'a, with a barrel bomb on 23 March 2015, which led to the destruction of the hospital.

Paragraphs 5, 6 and 7. All parties must immediately lift sieges of populated areas and allow unrestricted delivery of humanitarian aid. All parties must promptly allow United Nations humanitarian agencies and partners safe and unhindered access to populations in need.

Violation: the Syrian regime continues to besiege civilian communities

- 640,200 Syrians are currently under siege. No humanitarian aid organization or United Nations agency has been able to enter to meet the needs of the besieged population.

- The Syrian American Medical Society estimates that 38 additional besieged communities should be added to the United Nations list of besieged areas.

- The Syrian regime continues to impose sieges on Eastern Ghouta, Daraya, Hajar Aswad and Tadamun in Damascus. The sieges prevent residents from leaving these areas and also prevent the entry of essential materials such as food, medicine and medical supplies, fuel and infant formula. Further, the sieges deny all agencies and humanitarian organizations access to these areas, which continue to be shelled on a daily basis by many types of artillery, including rockets and barrel bombs.

- The humanitarian situation in the besieged areas worsens by the day, especially with the spread of communicable diseases at epidemic scale as a result of the blockade. Some of these include inflammation of the liver, typhoid, measles and tuberculosis. The situation is made worse by a deficit in the medical supplies needed to treat these diseases, compounded by the weakened immune systems of individuals under siege.

- On 10 March 2015, the Syrian regime closed the Wafideen Camp crossing, which was the only one to allow some merchants into the besieged area of Eastern Ghouta, to sell specific food items at prices 4-5 times higher than those of items in Damascus and in very limited quantities. This contributed to an increase in the food shortage and their prices. Prior to closure, the Syrian regime prevented several United Nations aid convoys from entering Eastern Ghouta through the Wafideen Camp crossing.

- The besieged neighbourhood of al Waer is west of Homs city, which has about 15,000 displaced families, and is currently under the control of the Free Syrian Army. The neighbourhood is surrounded by military barriers imposed by Syrian regime forces, preventing people from leaving the area.